

Barter Theatre Some Interesting Facts

Barter Theatre was founded during the Depression by Robert Porterfield, an enterprising young actor. He and his fellow actors were out of work in New York City, but Porterfield knew that in his native southwestern Virginia, the situation was the opposite: people had plenty of food, but no live theatre.

Porterfield returned to Abingdon, Virginia, with an extraordinary proposition: People could barter produce from their farms and gardens to gain admission to see a play. “Bartering” means to trade goods or services without exchanging money.

Barter Theatre opened its doors on June 10, 1933, proclaiming, “With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh.” The price of admission was 40 cents in cash or 40 cents worth of produce. The concept of trading “ham for Hamlet” caught on quickly. At the end of the first season, the Barter Company had made a profit of \$4.35 in cash and two barrels of jelly. The people at Barter had also collectively gained over 300 pounds.

Famous playwrights including Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams, and Thornton Wilder accepted Virginia ham as payment for royalties. One exception was George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, who bartered the rights to his plays for spinach.

There are many firsts in the history of Barter Theatre. In 1946, Virginia designated Barter as its official State Theatre — a concept that was new at the time, but which many states nationwide now do. In 1949, when taking a production of *Hamlet* to Denmark, Barter was the first theatre group to be funded in part by the federal government through the U.S. Department of the Interior. Barter was a founding member of the League of Resident Theatres, a national association of professional theatres. The year 2008 marked Barter’s 75th anniversary, which makes it one of the longest-running professional equity theatres in the nation. An equity theatre employs members of the Actors’ Equity Association, which is the labor union representing more than 40,000 American actors and stage managers who work in professional theatre.

Barter’s excellent reputation builds on a history during which many famous actors performed there first before going on to achieve fame and fortune. The most recognized of these alumni include Academy Award winners Gregory Peck, Patricia Neal, Ernest Borgnine, and Kevin Spacey, as well as Hume Cronyn and Ned Beatty. The list also includes James Burrows (the creator and producer of *Cheers*), Barry Corbin (*L.A. Law*), Larry Linville (*M*A*S*H*), Wayne Knight (*Seinfeld*), Kat Foster (*Til Death, The Unusuals*), and the late John Spencer (*West Wing*).

History is always in the making at Barter Theatre. While building on the legends of the past, Barter looks forward to the challenge of growth in the future.

Questions for Review

What does “barter” mean?

What does “ham for Hamlet” mean?

What makes Barter Theatre unique?

What is an equity theatre?



Basic Information for the *Miss Nelson is Missing* Curtain Speech

*The Barter Players from the Historic Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, present to you: *Miss Nelson is Missing* adapted from the book by Harry Allard and James Marshall by Joan Cushing. Directed by David McCall.

(If you would like to include a highlight or two of the history of Barter – feel free. The information is in this packet.)

***The use of photography and recording devices are not allowed during the performance.**

*Thank you to The Barter Players' year-round sponsor: Alpha Natural Resources and to Mr. Rick Nida for today's performance.

*Other announcements you may have:

(So we will know exactly when to begin the show, please end with:)

*Let's give a warm welcome to The Barter Players as they bring you *Miss Nelson is Missing*.

Katy Brown, Artistic Director • 276-619-3327 • barterplayers@bartertheatre.com

Richard Rose, Producing Artistic Director

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